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**Project report**  
**STS390, “Media, war and peace”**  
**Spring session, 2004**  
**Science, Technology & Society**  
**University of Wollongong**

# **Just War theory and the US-led War on Iraq from 2003.**

**Was the decision by the US government to invade Iraq  
justified under Just War theory?**

## **Introduction**

One of the perennial realities of human existence is war. From the earliest recorded events of human history through to the present, humans have engaged in armed conflict as a method of dispute resolution. Yet, the same perpetrators of warfare seem virtually incapable of mass armed violence in the absence of reasons for seeing their cause to be right (Wells, 1996: 255). Thus, while war has been a constant part of human existence, there has also been a tendency within virtually all human civilizations to limit the extent of war and the methods by which warfare may be conducted (DeForrest, 1997, <http://www.across-borders.com>, cited 25/4/04).

Over centuries, the connected questions of when war is ‘right’ and what means are acceptable in warfare has been the subject of a great deal of examination. The basic theory that has arisen to evaluate the legitimacy of military action is called just war theory. The just war theory has received widespread acceptance both within Western

culture and in the international community as a means by which a war may be determined to be justified or not, and as such “may be the most universally recognized moral theory by which the use of force may be evaluated” (DeForrest, 1997, <http://www.across-borders.com>, cited 25/4/04).

This essay will attempt to determine whether the decision by the United States government to invade Iraq in 2003 was justified under just war theory. This essay will first present a general overview of just war theory, and then apply this theory to the US decision, demonstrating that the invasion does not meet the criteria of just war theory as commonly understood.

It is important to note that despite the widespread acceptance and international recognition the just war theory has received, “mainstream media systems in far too many instances function as a megaphone for official views and sanitized news” (Schechter, 2003: xxv). That is, an ‘unjust’ war may be represented as ‘just’ by the news media (especially the mainstream news media) in an attempt to support ‘official views’ and promote ‘official’ decisions. As such, it becomes apparent that a populace that is dependent upon a biased or inclined news media as its primary information source is often only endowed with an incomplete and non-representative depiction of events. Following the above-mentioned analysis of just war theory, therefore, this paper will demonstrate that in relation to the ‘unjust’ invasion of Iraq, the mainstream news media from the invading coalition countries perpetuated the notion of its being a ‘just’ invasion, in an attempt to support the views and decisions made by their respective governments.

## **Overview of Just War Theory**

Just war theory has a varied and diverse background. The just war tradition includes the contributions of philosophers and theologians dating back to Roman times, including, most notably, its recognition and study by such historical thinkers as Cicero, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and Grotius (Wells, 1996: 256). Further, just war theory has been strongly influenced by international law, the traditions of chivalry, and soldierly practices derived from the experiences of battle (Holmes, 1992: 202).

As a consequence of World War II, two basic documents were issued which resulted in increased recognition of just war theory in the international arena. The first document is the charter for the Nuremberg war crimes trial, and the second is the United Nations Charter. The Nuremberg Charter encapsulated the concept of just war theory as represented by both St. Thomas Aquinas and Grotius, establishing that just war theory is universally-binding customary law (DeForrest, 1997, <http://www.across-borders.com>, cited 25/4/04). The United Nations Charter also has contributed to just war theory by recognizing the intrinsic right of each sovereign nation to self-defense. While effectively outlawing the use of military force as a method of resolving international conflicts between nation states, the UN Charter at the same time recognizes the right of each nation to defend itself from an attack from an exterior force “which is by its very nature unlawful” (Holmes, 1992: 205).

Despite such diverse sources and historical development, however, just war theory has several commonly recognized elements. These elements are traditionally made up of two distinct but related themes. One, dealing with *jus in bello*, was to establish rules for the conduct of war once it had begun. It dealt with such issues as “the legitimacy of killing noncombatants, the treatment of prisoners, the use of poisons, appropriation of property, and the use of especially terrible weapons” (Holmes, 1992: 203). The other, dealing with *jus ad bellum*, was to “establish rules governing the resort to war in the first place and to lay down conditions under which war could justifiably be waged at all” (Holmes, 1992: 203). Since this essay is interested only in the decision made by the US-led coalition to invade Iraq, and not with the legitimacy of the conduct of the war itself, it will limit its analysis on just war theory to the *jus ad bellum*.

The *jus ad bellum* involves six distinct conditions: (1) the cause must be just, (2) a right authority must make the decision to go to war, (3) groups going to war must do so with a right intention, (4) war must be undertaken only as a last resort, (5) the goal of the war must be a likely emergent peace, and (6) the war must be proportionate. Each of these conditions must be met prior to a decision to go to war. All six conditions must be met, or the decision to go to war cannot be considered just.

[Note: The reaching of conclusions as to whether or not each of these conditions has been met is highly subjective, depending largely upon the sometimes-biased opinions of the author. Given this, this paper will attempt to present a balanced argument – introducing both the case for the condition being met, and the case against, whenever possible before reaching a decision. Yet, it should still be noted that the conclusions reached in this paper will not necessarily be shared by all.]

## **Application of Just War Theory to US-led actions**

### **1. The cause must be just.**

Wells asserts, “a war is justly undertaken in response to aggression” (1996: 256). A use or threat of force by one state against the political autonomy or territorial integrity of another state constitutes aggression. Further,

Aggression can be made out not only in the absence of a military attack or invasion but in the (probably) absence of any immediate intention to launch such an attack or invasion. The general formula must go something like this: states may use military force in the face of threats of war, whenever the failure to do so would seriously risk their territorial integrity or political independence. Under such circumstances it can fairly be said that they have been forced to fight and that they are the victims of aggression (Holmes, 1992: 230).

The principle of just cause has been extended in recent times to cover also defense of another state against aggression, intervention to protect potential victims of massacre, assisting secessionists, and even pre-emptive strikes against potential aggressors.

The issue under this first requirement is whether the US-led coalition acted with just cause in using military force to invade Iraq in 2003. More specifically, was the invasion of Iraq undertaken in response to aggression by Iraq?

The case presented by the US President, George W. Bush, in identifying Iraq’s aggressive behavior (therefore justifying the invasion) was twofold. Firstly, in his “State of the Union” address from January of 2003, President Bush argued that Iraq had created and concealed weapons of mass destruction that could potentially be used to cause harm to the American people, or to the other innocent people of the world:

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Almost three months ago, the United Nations Security Council gave Saddam Hussein his final chance to disarm. He has shown instead utter contempt for the United Nations, and for the opinion of the world. The 108 U.N. inspectors were sent to conduct -- were not sent to conduct a scavenger hunt for hidden materials across a country the size of California. The job of the inspectors is to verify that Iraq's regime is disarming. It is up to Iraq to show exactly where it is hiding its banned weapons, lay those weapons out for the world to see, and destroy them as directed. Nothing like this has happened.

The United Nations concluded in 1999 that Saddam Hussein had biological weapons sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax -- enough doses to kill several million people. He hasn't accounted for that material. He's given no evidence that he has destroyed it.

The United Nations concluded that Saddam Hussein had materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin -- enough to subject millions of people to death by respiratory failure. He hadn't accounted for that material. He's given no evidence that he has destroyed it.

Our intelligence officials estimate that Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent. In such quantities, these chemical agents could also kill untold thousands. He's not accounted for these materials. He has given no evidence that he has destroyed them.

U.S. intelligence indicates that Saddam Hussein had upwards of 30,000 munitions capable of delivering chemical agents. Inspectors recently turned up 16 of them -- despite Iraq's recent declaration denying their existence. Saddam Hussein has not accounted for the remaining 29,984 of these prohibited munitions. He's given no evidence that he has destroyed them.

From three Iraqi defectors we know that Iraq, in the late 1990s, had several mobile biological weapons labs. These are designed to produce germ warfare agents, and can be moved from place to a place to evade inspectors. Saddam Hussein has not disclosed these facilities. He's given no evidence that he has destroyed them.

The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed in the 1990s that Saddam Hussein had an advanced nuclear weapons development program, had a design for a nuclear weapon and was working on five different methods of enriching uranium for a bomb. The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa. Our intelligence sources tell us that he has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production. Saddam Hussein has not credibly explained these activities. He clearly has much to hide.

Year after year, Saddam Hussein has gone to elaborate lengths, spent enormous sums, taken great risks to build and keep weapons of mass destruction. But why? The only possible explanation, the only possible use he could have for those weapons, is to dominate, intimidate, or attack.

Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late. Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option.

As such, President Bush promoted the notion that the US was potentially the victim of Iraqi aggression as the American people were faced with the threat of an imminent attack from Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. To allow Saddam Hussein to stay

in power (and consequently in control of these unchecked weapons), it can be argued, would therefore seriously risk US ‘territorial integrity’.

The second case presented by President Bush (and the coalition) in justifying a war on Iraq concerns Iraqi links to terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, the group responsible for the attacks on the US on September 11, 2001:

Evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of Al Qaeda. Secretly, and without fingerprints, he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own.

Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans -- this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known. We will do everything in our power to make sure that that day never comes.

As such, Bush argued that not only was the US warranted in taking military action in response to the act of aggression that was launched on the US two years earlier, but a war on Iraq was necessary in terms of ensuring that Saddam Hussein could not sell his weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups who could potentially attack the American people again.

However, upon further analysis, it can be shown that neither of the validations/justifications presented by President Bush and supported by the coalition meet the necessary requirements of ‘just cause’.

In regards to President Bush’s first argument – that Saddam Hussein could use his weapons of mass destruction against the US – Rampton and Stauber (2003) note that such a line of reasoning does not make sense when considered in conjunction with US military policy in regards to North Korea, who was in possession of weapons of mass destruction, and further had the means to fire them at the United States:

“North Korea already has 100 missiles that have a range of 1,000 kilometers,” said US senator Bob Graham in an October 2002 television interview. “They’re working on a missile that would have range sufficient to reach the West Coast of the United States. They have two nuclear weapons today, and ... they could start adding nuclear weapons. Conversely, Saddam Hussein, we

have no reason to believe that he has nuclear weapons, although he is striving to secure them. And he has relatively limited, in range and number, methods of delivering of those” (89)

Senator Bob Graham went on to comment in this speech that if he was asked the question of which country was a greater threat to the US – Iraq or North Korea – he would “answer the question with a resounding North Korea” (Rampton and Stauber, 2003: 89). Further, Graham, who chaired the Senate Intelligence Committee, asked the CIA in July 2002 to report on the likelihood that Saddam Hussein would use weapons of mass destruction. A senior CIA intelligence witness responded that the likelihood was “low” for the “foreseeable future” (Rampton and Stauber, 2003: 89). Yet, President Bush claimed that the US was facing an imminent threat of attack from Iraq, and therefore needed to take urgent military action. By this reasoning, the US did not have ‘just cause’ in invading Iraq.

In regards to President Bush’s second argument – that Saddam Hussein could sell his weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups for their use against America - Rampton and Stauber (2003) again assert that this justification for war was fallacious. These authors commented that “the idea of an alliance between Al Qaeda and Iraq was unlikely, since Osama bin Laden’s hatred for the “infidel” regime of Saddam Hussein was long-standing and well know before September 11” (92). Further, while Chomsky (2003) concedes that Saddam Hussein had proven himself to be a brutal tyrant who in all probability was concealing weapons of mass destruction, he also comments that:

If he [Saddam Hussein] had chemical and biological weapons, they were kept under tight control and subjected to a proper chain of command. He would surely not put them in the hands of the Osama bin Ladens of the world, a terrible threat to Saddam himself (123).

It does not therefore seem likely that the US was faced with a threat of aggression from Iraq, or at risk of aggression from a terrorist group who could theoretically obtain weapons of mass destruction from Saddam Hussein. There was no impending threat of war against the US, and there appears to have been no threat to US territorial integrity or political independence. It is unlikely, therefore, that the decision made by the US-led coalition to invade Iraq meets the necessary requirements of ‘just cause’.

[Note: given that this essay is only dealing with the *jus ad bellum*, or the US decision to go to war, it is irrelevant that no weapons of mass destruction were found within Iraq, as this discovery only came once the invasion had taken place. At the time of the invasion, it was widely accepted that Saddam Hussein was concealing such weapons within Iraq.]

## **2. A right authority must make the decision to go to war**

Historically, right authority has meant the legitimate decision makers of governments; “this has included, in varying contexts, heads of state, rulers, monarchs, presidents, generals, prime ministers, legislative bodies, etc” (Wells, 1996: 257). Over the past few hundred years the principle of right authority has shifted from resting with single individuals to resting with the collective will of those people directly affected by the potential gains and burdens of the war in question.

In reference to the US government decision to invade Iraq, the ‘right’ and ‘legitimate’ authority can be considered the US Government, under the direction of President Bush (DeForrest, 1997, <http://www.across-borders.com>, cited 25/4/04). It would appear that the US did act within the constraints of this requirement. Under the American Constitution, the President of the United States has the lawful authority, as commander-in-chief, to use military force, so long as Congress is notified (DeForrest, 1997, <http://www.across-borders.com>, cited 25/4/04). The constitutional and legal requirements of this action were met, so the US action was carried out by competent authority.

## **3. Groups going to war must do so with a right intention**

“The only right intention for a just war is the will to right the wrong of aggression and to bring about peace” (Wells, 1996: 257). The motives of those engaged in making the decision to go to war must not be tinged with vengeance or a desire for retribution. Further, the motives must not be to intend domination, harm, cruelty, or personal or national self-interest (Tucker, 1960: 11).



Can it be reasonably argued that the US government's intention in going to war was to bring about peace? Can it also be reasoned that US intentions were not 'tinged' with a desire for vengeance, retribution or national self-interest?

It would appear, again, from President Bush's public speeches that a US-led military campaign in Iraq would only be undertaken in order to lessen terrorist threat throughout the world:

This threat [terrorism] is new; America's duty is familiar. Throughout the 20th century, small groups of men seized control of great nations, built armies and arsenals, and set out to dominate the weak and intimidate the world. In each case, their ambitions of cruelty and murder had no limit. In each case, the ambitions of Hitlerism, militarism, and communism were defeated by the will of free peoples, by the strength of great alliances, and by the might of the United States of America.

Now, in this century, the ideology of power and domination has appeared again, and seeks to gain the ultimate weapons of terror. Once again, this nation and all our friends are all that stand between a world at peace, and a world of chaos and constant alarm. Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility.

The US, as one of the few countries standing between 'a world at peace' and the 'world of chaos and constant alarm' that terrorism produces, would therefore bring about peace by means of crushing this threat, through ridding Iraq of its dictator Saddam Hussein and eliminating Iraq's supply of weapons of mass destruction.

However, various authors have posited numerous theories regarding additional US motives, none of which satisfy the requirements of 'right intention'. The most commonly purported theory concerning America's 'true' intention in invading Iraq involves a potential US government desire to acquire Iraq's oil supply; "the fundamental motive seems to be the geopolitical position that Iraq holds in the Middle East [as one of] the three major oil and natural gas producing states (Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia)" (*Civiltà Cattolica*, cited in Novact, 2003, [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com), 25/4/04). Gillespie (2004), one of the most fervent proponents of this theory comments on the sizeable incentive this must have been to the US:

[In 2003] the price of crude oil was between US\$30 and US\$40 per barrel. Iraq has the capacity to export 2.2 million barrels of oil per day. Even at the lower price, thirty dollars per barrel, this works out at 66 million American dollars worth of oil per day, a mighty prize for a successful invasion and occupation of Iraq (279).

Novact, however, disagrees with such claims, arguing instead that:

At present, oil companies from France, Russia and China have contracts to help develop Iraqi oil fields. Europe depends far more upon oil from Iraq than America (only a tiny fraction of US oil comes from Iraq, about six per cent). Oil from Iraq, indeed oil from the entire Middle East, ranks higher among European national interests than American. For some years, the United States has been moving to draw the preponderance of its oil from our own hemisphere, mostly from Canada, Mexico and Venezuela, and to cut back steadily on its use of Middle Eastern oil, to the level now of 26 per cent of its annual... Within 15 years the United States hopes to be running a significant proportion of its automobiles and its heating appliances on hydrogen power. Experimental models are already in fairly wide use, and President Bush announced a major research program to support this effort. The goal of the United States is energy independence and, in the shorter term, continuing reductions in reliance on Middle Eastern oil (2003, [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com), 25/4/04).

While it can therefore be reasonably argued that acquiring access to Iraq's oil supply upon invasion may not have been the intention of the US government in going to war (but purely an added bonus), Murray and Scales (2003) offer further reasoning as to another potential US motive which, they conclude, takes precedent over all others:

At the end of the day, the Iraq War of 2003 was not about oil or the stability of the Middle East, though these were important factors, to be sure. Nor was it primarily about the liberation of the Iraqi people or even about the need to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction. Rather ... the Iraq War was a clear demonstration to the entire world that the United States, in the wake of September 11 has the capacity and will to defeat rogue states and confront those who threaten the vital interests of the American people (251-252).

In the post-September-11 world, therefore, an international reputation for weakness could prove to be extremely dangerous; “the destruction of Saddam’s regime in a short, swift military campaign offered the chance to warn others that the United States’ interests could be threatened only at a terrible cost to the aggressors” (Murray and Scales, 2003: 43). So, while it can be argued, as done by President Bush, that in going to war with Iraq the US intended to bring about peace by defeating terrorism, it can also be reasonably argued that US government motives were also ‘tinged’ with a desire for national self-interest, and as a result does not meet the requirements of ‘right intention’.

#### 4. War must be undertaken only as a last resort

For war to be justly undertaken, all avenues for righting the wrong of aggression must have been exhausted first. The just war tradition presumes the moral abhorrence of war and insists that war must be avoided if possible (Wells, 1996: 256).

The issue under this fourth requirement is whether the US-led coalition exhausted all avenues in bringing about peace before invading Iraq in 2003. It is fair to say that the coalition governments did pursue a number of paths in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the Iraq ‘situation’ before embarking on war, such as backing the presence of United Nations arms inspectors in Iraq, and the “decision to go through the difficult processes of diplomacy in the United Nations” (Murray and Scales, 2003: 43).

However, it has been argued by Martin (2002) in his article *A nonviolent plan to oust Saddam* that Saddam Hussein could have been overthrown from his leadership of Iraq (and therefore his control of any weapons of mass destruction) as a result of another approach not considered by the US government – nonviolent action undertaken by the Iraqi people in withdrawing consent:

The soft underbelly of any dictatorship is the ability of the population, including soldiers, to withdraw consent. Take away that consent and the regime will collapse (2003).

Martin goes on to assert that such success has been realized in the past. For example, in the toppling of many Eastern European regimes in 1989 “[t]here were no foreign military attacks, no guerrilla struggles, no sabotage. Instead, there were rallies in the streets, initially small but before long massive, causing entrenched communist rulers to lose their nerve and resign without a fight” (2003). If the Iraqi people were given the “tools and encouragement” to partake in such acts it may have been possible therefore to avoid war:

The same methods can be applied against Saddam Hussein. There are opposition groups in Iraq that can tap into widespread anti-Saddam sentiment. There are oil and electricity workers who, if they abandon their jobs or gum up the works, can bring the regime to its knees. There are security units that can be persuaded to switch allegiance (2003).

Thus, while it can be reasoned that the coalition did go to lengths to avoid a war with Iraq, it does not appear that all avenues were exhausted first – it is possible that through providing the Iraqi people with the motivation and ability to oust Saddam Hussein, war

could still have been avoided. As such, it can be argued that the US-led invasion did not satisfy this requirement.

### **5. The goal of the war must be a likely emergent peace**

The just war tradition requires that “war be undertaken only if it is likely to generate conditions of lasting peace” (Wells, 1996: 256). Such conditions would have to set right the problems that provoked the aggression that broke the peace.

The issue under this requirement, therefore, is whether the US invasion of Iraq was likely to generate conditions of lasting peace by setting right the ‘problems’ that provoked the ‘aggression’. Could a non-peaceful alternative have been foreseen?

US purported goals of an invasion of Iraq would, if achieved, likely result in peace. For example, the lessening of a terrorist threat throughout the world, the ousting of Saddam Hussein (a brutal and tyrannical dictator), and the dismantling of Iraq’s supply of weapons of mass destruction, could all be seen to result in peace, in terms of saving lives and making the world a safer, less hostile place.

However, it can also be reasoned that non-peaceful alternatives could have been foreseen. As Manne (2003) comments, “even after the ouster of Saddam, it is possible that Iraq will descend into a nightmare of revenge killings, anarchy and new tyranny.” For example, uproar by Iraqi people, enraged by a US-led occupation of their country, could have been anticipated, as could hostility from supporters of Saddam Hussein, both within Iraq and throughout the world. Further, a possible violent backlash against the occupying US-led soldiers within Iraq could have been considered a non-peaceful outcome of an invasion of Iraq. As Manne (2003) concludes, “the immediate outcome of the war will, then, certainly be tragic...”

While it must again be noted that the reaching of a conclusion in regards to whether or not this condition is satisfied is subjective, it is the view of this paper that overall, a more peaceful and enduring result was likely. While initial resistance could have been

reasonably foreseen, the outcome of a US-led invasion in the long-term would likely set right the problems that provoked the aggression, therefore resulting in an emergent peace.

## **6. The war must be proportionate**

To be just, a war must be proportionate. That is, the total evil of a just war cannot outweigh the good achieved by the war (Wells, 1996: 256). War is taken up justly only where the total good to come from the war is likely to outweigh the total evil of making war; “if the price of the projected war is too great in total dislocation, suffering, and death, including all human, economic, and cultural costs, in comparison to the good likely to come of it, again, considering all the likely gains, then the war is disproportionate” (Wells, 1996: 256).

The issue under this requirement is whether there were any apparent detriments of a US-led invasion of Iraq that could be perceived to outweigh its benefits. What good would be achieved by going to war? And what evil would result?

The most obvious benefit to come from an invasion would be the discovery and subsequent destruction of Saddam Hussein’s stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. Given the number of weapons the coalition believed Hussein to be in possession of (as identified in Bush’s State of the Union address, and similar addresses presented by Australian Prime Minister John Howard and British Prime Minister Tony Blair), and given popular belief as to the inevitability of Saddam Hussein’s using them, such an acquisition would potentially save thousands, if not millions, of lives around the world.

Further, war with Iraq would likely see the ousting of Saddam Hussein as its ruler, who had proved to be a brutal tyrant during his dictatorship. For example:

Saddam Hussein was ... responsible for the torture and death of thousands – in fact, hundreds of thousands – of innocent people ... Women and children accounted for 75 percent of the estimated 5,000 people killed when he gassed his own citizens – Iraqi Kurds in the village of Halabja in 1988 (Rampton and Stauber, 2003: 75).

His removal from the leadership of Iraq would ensure such atrocities did not occur in the future, potentially saving the lives of thousands of Iraqi's and sparing many more from enduring torture.

However, there are a number of detriments that would occur in the event of a war on Iraq, most notably the humanitarian troubles the Iraqi people would face. For example, in the lead-up to war, a number of international aid and medical agencies warned that a war might lead to a serious humanitarian catastrophe, given that the Iraqi people were “living at the edge of survival after a decade of destructive sanctions” (Chomsky, 2003: 126). Further, if the war of 2003 proved to be anything like the 1991 war, involving the purposeful destruction of water, power, and sewage systems, the United Nations Security Council warned that a war would generate “huge flows of refugees and a public health crisis,” that was not adequately addressed by US plans for humanitarian relief in a postwar Iraq (Chomsky, 2003: 126).

Additionally, while Saddam Hussein's regime could be considered horrifying and brutal, he nevertheless did direct oil profits to internal development, hoisted half the country's population into the middle class, and developed an educational policy that saw Arabs the world over come to study at Iraqi universities (Chomsky, 2003: 127). With his removal from power, the food and medicine distribution systems Saddam Hussein implemented would disappear, systems that the UN considered “as the most efficient distribution systems in the world.” Tun Myat, chief UN humanitarian coordinator commented moreover that in the event of a US-led occupation, there was “no way [the US] could create something else that would work half as well” as the Iraqi distribution methods, and that “the risk of a large-scale humanitarian crisis” would increase if anything happened to disrupt it (Chomsky, 2003: 127).

While again it is important to note that the comparison of benefits and detriments and the subsequent determination of which outweighs the other is highly subjective, this paper argues that the US-led coalition did meet the requirements of ‘proportion’. Given that the coalition was not aware that no weapons of mass destruction would be found before the invasion (the period *jus ad bellum* deals with), it is reasoned that the potential prevention

of the loss of countless lives as a result of invasion can be seen to outweigh the potential loss of a lesser number of Iraqi lives.

## **Mainstream news media representations of the US-led invasion of Iraq**

Given that the US-led invasion of Iraq did not satisfy the requirements of all six criteria, it can thus be reasoned that it was not justified under just war theory. Despite this, however, western mainstream news media (including especially the news media of the coalition nations) represented the invasion of Iraq as ‘just’. Given the variation between the conclusions this paper has reached and the actual media perpetuations regarding the invasion, this next section will attempt to demonstrate why the media proliferated ‘official’ yet misleading viewpoints, and detail how this representation was achieved.

In regards to media proliferations of ‘official’ viewpoints, Schechter (2003) argues that, while this has historically been the case, such disseminations are even more evident in today’s society:

We live in an age of media politics, governed not just by politicians but by what is in effect a “mediaocracy,” a mutually dependent relationship between media and politics, a nexus of power in which political leaders use media exposure to shape opinions and drive policy (xxvii).

Essentially, Schechter (2003) argues that the western mainstream news media does not act as an independent information source, but rather engages in professional associations with governments and politicians, in order to support their political policies through the dissemination of government-preferred discourses. In times of war, such as in the period surrounding the invasion of Iraq, Schechter (2003) comments that the support the media seem to offer appears to become even more fervent (xlii).

Providing further comment on the relationship between government/politicians and the mainstream media in times of war, Hess and Kalb (2003) in their book *The Media and the War on Terrorism* supply a number of interviews in which ‘expert’ representatives of the media make statements about such associations. For example, Kalb questions Barry Zorthian - US Embassy’s chief spokesman in Saigon during the Vietnam War, a senior

official in the US Foreign Service, and later member of the Board for International Broadcasting before retiring as vice president of Time, Inc:

*Kalb: Do you feel that the government has been successful, for the most part, in getting its message out to the American people?*

Zorthian: For the most part it has, because the media so far in our current situation has not been too challenging to the government.

*Kalb: What do you mean challenging?*

Zorthian: Well, I think by and large they've gone along with the feeling that this is a great threat to the United States, patriotism calls for acceptance of the government's viewpoint (26)

Although this interview, conducted in late 2001, does not deal specifically with the invasion of Iraq (instead the US war in Afghanistan), it still provides valuable insight – in times of war, or in times when a country is faced by a threat, 'patriotism calls for acceptance of the government's viewpoint'. At such times, the media is less 'challenging' to the government, instead offering them support in the form of government-preferred media items.

Additionally, Schechter (2003) comments that the media are prone to proliferate 'official' viewpoints in times of war as a result of what he calls the 'CNN effect':

...some media executives no doubt remembered what happened at CNN during the Gulf War when Peter Arnett's reports from Baghdad were characterized as pro-Iraqi by veterans' groups and other Desert Storm boosters. Reporting Saddam Hussein's response to U.S. charges was defined by many right-wing talk show hosts as the equivalent of justifying them, or, worse, an act of treason. (xlili)

No media company wants to "stir" such responses that could "blow back in their direction" (Schechter, 2003: xliv). 'Media companies' are therefore more likely to support their government's decisions, present their government's views as correct or justified, and offer little alternative opinions (as did CNN, subsequently facing dire consequences). This became especially clear to Schechter (2003) following the attacks of September-11 and in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, where he comments "much of the mainstream media reporting was carefully contained within a narrow discourse" (xlii), and as such, the portrayal of the invasion as 'just' was "largely unavoidable" (xlii).



Senior journalist from the *Illawarra Mercury*, Paul McInerney, agrees that the media's portrayal of the invasion of Iraq as 'just' was inescapable. With wartime journalistic experience including the reporting of the Lebanese Civil War of the 1970s, the Yom Kipper War in Israel, coverage of unrest in Northern Ireland, and of the war in Iran from 1976, McInerney was also responsible for writing a number of articles and editorials regarding the invasion of Iraq from 2003. Given such experience, McInerney makes comment regarding the news media's docile coverage of the invasion:

Once the commitment to go to war was made, and news-polls kept coming out showing a majority support for it, we fell in behind John Howard. And we had to support Howard's position, because there wasn't enough hard evidence to tell us otherwise; at first, the only information we had was from the government. So we covered [the invasion], talked about our boys, our SAS troops, the commitment we had made...Once our troops were operational it is as if we are governed by a different set of rules...supporting the prime minister and our country's decision.

While McInerney comments that a number of journalists, himself included, did not see the invasion of Iraq as 'just', given the initial support shown for the war by the public, and given the lack of 'hard evidence' in suggesting otherwise, such journalists still fell in reluctantly behind John Howard:

While we supported Howard's position, we generally fell in reluctantly behind him, simply because there wasn't enough hard evidence to say one-way or the other. This support also came from journalists who did not see the invasion as just, but had no alternative other than reporting these viewpoints. For example, well known journalist Paul McGowe, who was in Iraq during the invasion, didn't report alternative views or point out how unjust the war was, but instead showed his dislike for the invasion by simply highlighting the injustices of war, civilian deaths, destruction of infrastructure, etc.

While he may have 'disliked' the invasion of Iraq, and saw it as 'unjust', journalists such as Paul McInerney and Paul McGowe still supported the invasion of Iraq in their reporting, by not proliferating alternative or non-official viewpoints. Instead, the only voice of dissent ever reported was in the form of outlining the adverse nature of warfare itself.

Further, when discussing US media coverage of the invasion of Iraq, Schechter (2003) comments that while the mainstream news media supported the government's decision, they further made it difficult for alternative views to be heard:

Truth telling tends to be degraded when American flags start flying in the lapels of newscasters and in the graphics surrounding news sets. In this red, white, and blue environment, voices of dissent quickly disappear... (xxvi).

Thus, it can be reasoned that despite the invasion of Iraq being ‘unjust’ in nature, the news media from the coalition countries, responsible for beginning a war, instead represented the invasion as justified, in order to support the decisions and viewpoints of their governments. At the same time, this support for the war eliminated alternative standpoints.

## **Conclusion**

The US-led coalition’s invasion of Iraq does not satisfy the six crucial requirements of the just war theory. More specifically, this paper contends (although subjectively) that the invasion does not meet the conditions of the cause being just, the right intention in embarking upon war, or war being undertaken only as a last resort. Yet, despite such reasoning, the mainstream news media from the invading countries represented the decision to invade as ‘just’. It is purported that such perpetuations occurred as a result of a relationship that is shared by governments/politicians and the media, a relationship that ensures the dissemination of government-preferred viewpoints, and therefore support for their policies and decisions. Furthermore, the dependence of a majority of the population from the coalition nations upon the mainstream news-media for their understanding and use of just war theory suggests that unless alternative viewpoints are actively sought after, these people may only ever be exposed to false or non-representative (yet official) views of what is considered ‘just’. It can therefore be argued that until a time in which the relationship between governments and the news-media does no longer exist – a time when the news media is free to report in an unbiased and truly representative way – any future ‘unjust’ wars or invasions will continue to be represented as justified. This relationship, and the subsequent perpetuation of ‘false’ views to populations, may also have severe implications upon the widespread acceptance and recognition of just war theory itself; if an ‘unjust’ war is not depicted as such by the news media, and if a large percentage of a population is therefore not able to be made aware of a war’s true nature,

why does just war theory even exist, if only ‘official’ and sometimes ‘false’ ideas are ever disseminated? Unless an independent worldwide and respected/credible body is created, a body which has the capability to define accurately a war according to the criteria of just war theory, and the ability to deliver its findings to the entire world (irrespective of mainstream news-media’s perpetuations) just war theory may not longer be relevant in today’s society.

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